

Pier and Bay Studies Underway

Two separate committees formed to study issues surrounding Duxbury Bay have started gathering information and consulting outside resources.

"We're in the process of educating ourselves so we can educate others," said Bill Tenhoor, chair of the seven-member Pier Access and Shoreline Study Committee (PASS).

Duxbury has seen "pier proliferation" in the last fifteen years, Tenhoor said, and PASS was formed out of a desire to better balance the interests of private waterfront land owners and the public that wishes to fully utilize town landings.

The formation of PASS was approved at the last town meeting. A second article, which was defeated, sought a moratorium on the pier permitting process until PASS could issue its recommendations.

A tension exists between private owners who want their own dock and local fishermen and water enthusiasts who wish to access the water at all town landings, and enjoy unimpeded waterfront vistas, Tenhoor said.

One reason for this is a law unique to Massachusetts and Maine, that grants property rights to landowners from the low-tide mark, cutting off lateral access to the shoreline, Tenhoor said. All other states grant property rights only from the high-tide mark.

He estimates that one third of all waterfront properties in Duxbury currently have private docks.

"That's probably a conservative estimate, but that is why we are doing this study to get firm information, and inventory what exists so we can achieve a better trade off between the public and the waterfront property owner."

Duxbury has 16 public landings throughout the town, and PASS is in the process of evaluating each one.

Some of the town landings are overgrown by foliage and potential users may not know they are there, Tenhoor said.

The ultimate goal of PASS is to recommend new guidelines to the conservation commission, and new principles and practices governing the special permitting process required to receive approval to build a pier. PASS expects to present those recommendations at next year's town meeting.

PASS meets every other Thursday at the senior center.

The Duxbury Bay Management Committee, chaired by former selectman Margaret Kearney, has also been meeting every other week to develop a list of issues to be studied, and to establish a timeline for the

overall project.

The committee is currently looking at big picture issues, such as congestion in Duxbury Harbor, as well as congestion in the pier parking lot, shellfish grant capacity, and the issue of jet skis, said committee member Ned Lawson.

The committee is looking at a variety of sources for information, including a study done of Pleasant Bay near Chatham and Orleans. That study included a mailed survey to bay users, and the DBMC is looking at whether a similar survey would be useful.

The committee has also heard from officials from coastal zone management who

discussed harbor planning in other municipalities and from representatives of UMass Boston's Urban Harbors Institute.

The committee expects to have a final plan complete in December of 2004. The process will include public hearings and investigating the availability of outside grants.

The final committee report is expected to include an implementation strategy and a list of specific steps various agencies would need to take to enact the recommendations.

The DBMC meets on alternate Thursdays from PASS, at the senior center.